

**TERMINAL HIGH ALTITUDE AREA  
DEFENCE DEPLOYMENT IN  
SOUTH KOREA: A THREAT  
TO CHINA'S SECURITY?**

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## **Executive Summary**

1. China's security analysts believe that Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) deployment in South Korea would harm China's strategic security as THAAD's interception altitudes are too high to protect South Korea against North Korean missiles, but are high enough to intercept China's medium-range, long-range and intercontinental ballistic missiles.
2. They are concerned that THAAD's fire-control radar, which can be reconfigured into an early-warning radar, can scan deep inside China and provide extra early warning for intercepting Chinese missiles.
3. They also argue that it would contribute to a US-Japan-South Korea anti-missile alliance against China at China's doorstep; drive a wedge between China and South Korea; encourage Japan to import THAAD; and diminish US-China, South Korea-China and South Korea-North Korea trust, upsetting the "regional equilibrium" and making it more difficult to "de-nuclearise" North Korea.
4. Chinese analysts want measures, ranging from improving missile technologies to "penetrate" missile defence, jamming radar, deploying Chinese strategic nuclear submarines on patrol to enhancing China-Russia strategic cooperation, against THAAD deployment.
5. They also argue for economic sanctions, including voluntary embargo on travels to South Korea and boycotting South Korean soap operas and cosmetic products; imposing "technical barriers" on South Korean imports; shelving business deals and local economic and cultural exchanges with South Korea; and restricting activities of South Korean conglomerates and important individuals involved in China.
6. Moderate voices in China, however, argue that only THAAD's radar may pose a threat to China's strategic security and it could be replaced by the shorter-range Israeli radar. They also believe that the United States and China should open dialogue on THAAD deployment.

7. A closer scrutiny, however, reveals that many premises of Chinese analyses may be problematic. Even though THAAD may intercept China's medium-range missiles, its primary objective is to intercept North Korean short-range missiles. Its fire-control radar is not likely to be interchangeably used as an early-warning radar and this radar's contribution to early warning against Chinese missiles may be marginal.
8. Rather than a minor player, South Korea has a strong incentive to deploy THAAD. China would also do well to take some responsibility for its failed policy to prevent North Korea from conducting frequent missile and nuclear tests, which drives the decision to deploy THAAD in South Korea.